

# Prison Ministry

Fall 2019



Sharing Jesus with people impacted by incarceration



## There, but for the grace of God, go I

Dave Hochmuth, WELS Prison Ministry Administrator

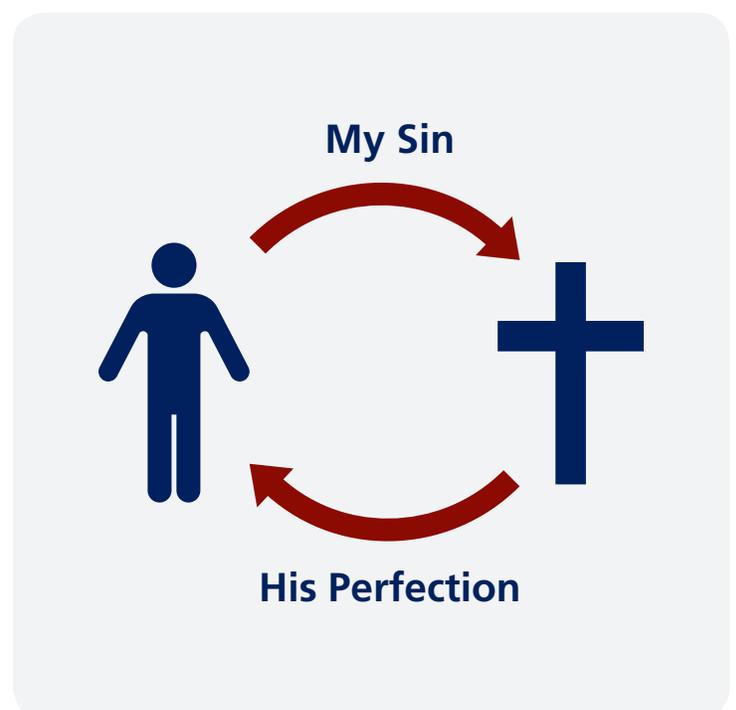
*At one time we all lived among [other sinners]. We tried to satisfy what our sinful nature wanted to do. We followed its longings and thoughts. God was angry with us and everyone else because of the kind of people we were. But God loves us deeply. He is full of mercy. So he gave us new life because of what Christ has done. He gave us life even when we were dead in sin. God's grace has saved you. Ephesians 2:3-5 (NIRV 1998)*

I'm surprised by how frequently I encounter the idea that there are "good" people and "bad" people in the world. To be sure, one can look around and immediately find examples of people whose outward lives conform to God-pleasing (or at least law-abiding) behavior. Other people make no effort to behave in a way that pleases God, even taking pride in their law breaking. Entertainment is full of law enforcement personnel (the good guys) trying to track down and lock up the monsters (the bad guys). We even hear some Christians voicing the question: "Why do bad things happen to good people?"

This kind of thinking can come too easily to anyone, even those who share Jesus with people behind bars. If we are not careful, Satan can get us to believe the lie that we are somehow inherently better or more valuable to God than the people we serve. Paul doesn't let us go there. He reminds us clearly that every single one of us was, by nature, dead in sin and deserved God's anger. But God's grace and love made faith come to life within us. We trust that Christ obliterated all our sins, whether great or small in the eyes of the world. God now sees anyone who trusts in Jesus' life and death in his or her place as perfectly fit for life with him forever. The grandma who never missed a Sunday in church for decades AND the man on death row, because of their trust in Jesus,

wear the robes of Jesus' righteousness. Both of them are not just good, but perfect people.

Tradition, though it cannot be proven, attributes our devotion's title to an English clergyman as he watched a line of condemned men being led to the gallows. When we realize how "unfair" God is, namely punishing his Son for our sins instead of us, we are better able to be compassionate and seek the welfare of others. We had an amazing reminder of that recently. Make sure you catch the story in this issue of how God's love to some inmates in South Dakota moved them to extend that love to others. Those who are forgiven much, love much.



## Her Many Sins Have Been Forgiven; That is Why She Loved so Much

*Pastor John Schwartz serves at Redeemer Lutheran Church in Pierre, S.D.*

"Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; that is why she loved so much. But the one who is forgiven little loves little." (EHV Lk 7:47). Jesus said these words after a woman, who is simply described as sinful, showed Jesus love by cleaning his feet with her tears and her hair. Whereas the master of the house, a Pharisee, did not show any such love to Jesus. Truly, those who have been forgiven much do love much. That love shows itself in many different ways, but I got to see this love in action recently – in prison of all places.

It started when Wanda Markland began her new job as warden of the Women's Prison in Pierre, S.D., about a year ago. Warden Markland has done many good things for the prison, perhaps the most impactful was bringing WELS Prison Ministry materials to the women's prison. Besides some books being available to read at the prison's library, many of them are available to be taken for free by the inmates. That is, if they get there fast enough. Amanda Kaur, an inmate who works at the library, said that sometimes they have to fill the free rack more than twice a day with WELS Prison books! With WELS Prison Ministry devotional books being distributed among the inmates,



*Warden Markland and Pastor Schwartz with some of the inmates that gathered a gift for WELS Prison Ministry.*

lives within the prison have been changed in ways only God through his Word could accomplish.

Many prisoners thirst for God's Word. Being asked what these devotional books meant to her, Katherine Dillard simply said, "Everything." Those devotional books were one way she was able to study the Bible. Others replied to the same question saying that because of the books they know they are loved; they know they are not alone; and they are able to grow in their spiritual life. One inmate even sought to be baptized after she read the devotional books. These books mean more than the world to those women. May the Lord have all Christians view God's Word with the same importance!

Where there is faith there are good works. These women, having heard God's Word, did not want to keep this good news to themselves. They too wanted to do what they could to share God's Word with others who need to hear it. Therefore, being moved by Christian love, inmates raised funds from what little they had to give a donation to WELS Prison Ministry. These women may not be able to wash Jesus feet with their tears and their hair, but they are showing him much love by studying his Word and showing love to others by spreading his Word.

## Welcome Home can be challenging

Welcoming a member who has been absent or scarce for a while back to church can be challenging in many circumstances, but especially if the person has spent time behind bars. The person trying to return to society in general and to one's church family often has a barrier of shame. If addictive behaviors were a factor in the conviction, avoiding people or environments that trigger these behaviors is particularly difficult, which leads to a staggeringly high re-arrest rate.

Our efforts to welcome home members of Jesus' flock that have wandered can demonstrate great love at a time of great need. Focusing these efforts on a specific Sunday can create needed urgency and encouragement to prompt us to act. But some wandering and lost sheep will take extra love and multiple invitations. Let us not grow weary of doing good.

WELS Prison Ministry has resources that are helpful for paving the road for released inmates to join or rejoin the family of Christ. Go to [csm.welsrc.net/prison-ministry-resources](http://csm.welsrc.net/prison-ministry-resources) to find:



- Samples of the “Water of Life” Bible studies specifically designed for returning citizens. The entire set of Bible Studies is available free for ministry use using the linked order form.
- Congregational Guidelines for Dealing with Sexual Offenders. These guidelines are downloadable.
- A link to a *Forward in Christ* article describing the mentoring program for struggling individuals initiated by congregations in the New Ulm, Minn., area.

If you have any questions regarding ways your congregation can show love to released inmates in helpful yet careful ways, contact Prison Ministry Administrator Dave Hochmuth ([dave.hochmuth@wels.net](mailto:dave.hochmuth@wels.net)).

## More Visibility for WELS Prison Ministry

In recent months we have had opportunities to share the joy of prison ministry with fellow WELS members and will have several more in the months ahead. The recently filmed 25th anniversary video was played at the 2019 WELS Convention last August. The video is available for viewing anytime on our website’s home page, [wels.net/pm](http://wels.net/pm). We also had display booths at the WELS EdTechLead conference and LWMS convention in June, as well as the OWLS convention in October. We continue to reach out to future called workers with our monthly WELS Prison Ministry MLC student nights.

Some upcoming activities in December will give more awareness of our efforts. *Forward in Christ* magazine will

contain an article describing the faith journey of former inmate, Daryl Fleck. He became connected with our correspondence course program while serving time in Minnesota. Upon release he sought out a WELS congregation, completed the Bible Information Course, and became a member. Daryl appeared in our 25th anniversary video.

In addition to Daryl’s story, the WELS Connection video used by many congregations will feature how WELS Special Ministries shows love and shares Christ with people in special circumstances. Prison Ministry will appear as a specific example. Finally, our ministry will also be featured in the quarterly mailing sent to people who give special or ongoing gifts directly to synod.

Watch for these stories in video and print. Use them as opportunities to share with friends the joy Jesus gives you in your Prison Ministry role. Invite those friends to join you in supporting (with prayer, volunteer time, or financial support) this amazing outreach ministry that shares Jesus with people impacted by incarceration.

### From a recent inmate letter...

I am currently incarcerated in the Texas Department of Corrections...and came across a brother in Christ who is currently enrolled in your mail-in Bible study course. What a great gift you offer to sinners such as ourselves! I thank you whole-heartedly for your continued devotion to reach out to people such as ourselves that society would much rather lock away and “throw away the key.” Many brothers in here have lost everything and EVERYONE and it is nice to see their faces light up when they receive mail from ministries such as yours. For a lot of these people, it is a sense of encouragement and joy to know that they are NOT forgotten and that there is SOMEONE out there who cares for them and prays for them. Again, “thank you” for that, on behalf of those who may not express their gratitude. I see it! And God sees your works! May God continue to bless each and every one of you so that you may continue to share those blessings.

Your brother in Christ,  
Mario

## Pen Pal Pipeline

Pen pal writing is an important way for us to share the gospel with inmates. So far in 2019, we have had 494 letters from inmates to 67 different pen pals come through our New Ulm office. It is incredible that we can reach so many with the gospel one on one!

The safety of the pen pal writer is always of vital concern for the Prison Ministry staff. Our Volunteer Guidelines state: "The only address you should use in your correspondence with your pen pal is: WELS Prison Ministry, PO Box 452, New Ulm, MN 56073. Send your pen pal letter to the above address. Use only Prison Ministry stationery and envelopes. This will ensure that the inmate does not know where you live..."

We urge you to abide by these instructions. Even if you feel your inmate is trustworthy, this prevents any chance that your name and address could fall into the hands of someone else in the facility that could do you harm.

Thanks for your faithful service to our ministry. You are reaching souls with God's Word every time you write a letter, and God blesses those words even if you don't see it. If you are not a pen pal and are interested in learning more, please contact the New Ulm office at [pmsec@wels.net](mailto:pmsec@wels.net) or at 507-354-3130.

*(Spanish - translated to English) I write to you to thank you for the tests because they have helped me a lot and I have learned about the life of Jesus, of how much he loves us as it says in John 3:16. Thank you for praying for me...you have helped me so much to learn beautiful things from the word of God. May his peace be with you. – Leo*

To get WELS Prison Ministry news and updates delivered straight to your inbox, subscribe at [wels.net/subscribe](http://wels.net/subscribe).

## Three ways to support our ministry

- 1. Pray** – As God's redeemed children, our prayers are powerful and effective. Current prayer requests include: help us find ways to distribute God's word electronically, especially where our booklets are not permitted; send the Holy Spirit to bless the Word and the inmates who are reading it; help us find a sustainable long-term funding plan.
- 2. Serve** – All our ministry efforts are driven by volunteers motivated by Christ's love. To volunteer as a pen pal or a test corrector, please contact us at [prisonministry@wels.net](mailto:prisonministry@wels.net) or 507-354-3130. To explore jail visitation or post-release mentoring opportunities, call 414-256-3243 or e-mail [dave.hochmuth@wels.net](mailto:dave.hochmuth@wels.net).
- 3. Give** – Much of WELS Prison Ministry financial support comes from people like you. We need it to continue to share Jesus. To support this work:
  - Send your gift to:  
**WELS Prison Ministry**  
N16W23377 Stone Ridge Drive  
Waukesha, WI 53188-1108  
*(Make checks payable to WELS Prison Ministry)*
  - Donate online at [wels.net/sm-donation](http://wels.net/sm-donation), click on "Designation" and choose: "Prison Ministry."
  - Give through your IRA charitable distribution, appreciated assets or your will or estate plan. Contact WELS Ministry of Christian Giving at 800-827-5482 for assistance.
  - Direct your Thrivent Choice dollars (if you are a Thrivent member) to WELS Prison Ministry. Contact Thrivent Member Care Services at 800-847-4836 for assistance.